

Wash Post
27 April 1981

ABC's Bomb Watch In the Middle East

By George C. Wilson

The fuse on The Bomb is already lit in the Middle East. This is the message ABC will transmit to television viewers tonight (channel 7 at 10) in a grim documentary entitled "Near Armageddon: The Road of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East."

Through taped interviews with relevant officials, past and present, and commentary by ABC correspondents, the viewer is told Israel has the nuclear bomb for sure; that Iraq, Libya

contradict claims by government leaders and industry executives that they are not helping to develop nuclear weapons for Middle Eastern countries. The producers obviously went to considerable pains and expense to trace how Israel might have obtained uranium for making nuclear weapons, with a Pennsylvania firm and a mystery ship their leading suspects. The same kind of detective work is presented to show how Iraq is inexorably advancing toward The Bomb.

Missing from the enlightening narratives are man-in-the-street reactions, or even pictures of anti-nuclear protests, to underscore that some people are trying to throw themselves in front of the blind march toward a nuclear Armageddon. Perhaps because of that missing emotion, the program has a certain antiseptic quality as it warns that the Middle East may soon incinerate itself.

Also, the viewer is left with a feeling of helplessness. Some kind of summing up on what could be done to avoid Armageddon would have been welcome. However, the first step toward getting a problem solved is to force everyone to look at it. ABC must get high marks for doing that. The problem cannot be overexposed. "Near Armageddon" is a significant contribution.

TV Preview

Pakistan are working on it with help of countries that should know better — Belgium, France and Switzerland. Egypt is portrayed as a distant candidate for joining the nuclear club.

Camera crews succeed in portraying the irony of underdeveloped countries spending billions on expensive and dangerous weapons — billions that could go for food, waterways, roads and housing. Each mini-chapter on four countries opens with scenes depicting primitive conditions of bar-landscapes or crowded streets.

The reporting rings true as the commentators present evidence to